School Reform News

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"The Heart and Soul of an Excellent Education"

William Bennett sets education on its ear with the launching of K12, an Internet-based learning program. *Page 16.*

Choice Fades on Capitol Hill

"Bipartisan" education reform silences many good ideas

BY ROBERT HOLLAND

As Congress got to work on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) just before Memorial Day, it appeared President George W. Bush would get his wish, expressed just after taking office, for "bipartisan" education reform legislation.

But to make that wish come true, the administration has paid a price some critics of the federal presence in public education deemed too high.

Key Elements Gone

Two major casualties in committee actions on the ESEA bill, H.R. 1, were:

- The voucher provision, which would have allowed a family with a child enrolled in a chronically failing public school to use up to $1,500 of its Title I subsidy to pay tuition at a private school; and
- The Straight A's block grants, which would have permitted seven states and 25 school districts to spend their federal aid as they saw fit, in exchange for an agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Education that their schools would produce significant gains in achievement.

With those changes, H.R. 1 won the approval of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce by a 41-7 vote, with six Republicans and only one Democrat dissenting.

The principal element of the Bush plan surviving committee and House floor votes was a federally mandated system of testing all pupils in grades 3 through 8 every year in reading and mathematics. States could develop their own tests, but the results would have to be confirmed by a "second snapshot" provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or a professionally recognized test of the state's choosing. If NAEP were the

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Thirteen-year-old Sean Conley, of Aitkin, Minnesota, holds the trophy with his mother, Bry, and father, Mike, after winning the 74th annual U.S. spelling bee by correctly spelling the word "succedaneum" in Washington, May 31, 2001. The computer whiz, who came in second last year, but beat out 247 competitors this year, has been homeschooled by his mother.
photo/Mike Theiler-Reuters

Bush Says Reading Is Job 1

Reading First plan may reduce use of "learning disabled" tag

BY KELLY AMIS

While many of President George W. Bush's education reform proposals are meeting stern opposition in Congress, one of his pet projects is sailing through with nary a raised eyebrow.

Bush's "Reading First" initiative would target federal funds to help students learn to read in the early grades. Despite its relatively large price tag—about $5 billion over five years—the program appears on its way to easy ratification. The President already is lining up a cadre of reading experts to get the program rolling as soon as it is approved.

Within days of taking office, Bush introduced a bold education plan, titled "No Child Left Behind," to serve as a blueprint for Congressional reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government's primary vehicle for influencing K-12 education. It came as no surprise that Bush, who championed literacy in the early grades as Governor of Texas, included the Reading First initiative in his federal blueprint.

Close on the heels of the Bush

READING continued on page 8

Parents Give Voucher Schools an "A"

Despite having more resources, public schools rate only a "C"

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Three weeks before Capitol Hill lawmakers rejected a proposal to spend $50 million on a multi-city school voucher experiment, Harvard researchers released the first survey of parents who had participated in a nationwide voucher program that was privately funded and ultimately will cost three to four times the amount Congress was unwilling to spend.

The survey results were overwhelmingly positive, with a clear majority of parents reporting they were "very satisfied" with the private school the vouchers had enabled their children to attend.

In sharp contrast, only a small minority of parents reported they were "very satisfied" with the public schools where their children had remained because they had not been awarded a voucher by lottery. Just 16.2 percent of public school parents gave their school an "A" grade, compared to 71.5 percent of private school parents.

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Cleveland Voucher Case Appealed to U.S. Supreme Court

4,000 children use vouchers to escape inadequate schools

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

On May 23, Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to provide a definitive ruling on the Cleveland Scholarship Program, where conflicting decisions have been handed down by the state supreme court and the federal Sixth District Court.

The next day, voucher families represented by the Washington, DC-based Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm, also filed an appeal requesting the high court to review and ultimately overturn a December 2000 decision of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. That ruling found the program unconstitutional because of the predominance of religious schools among the educational institutions that chose to accept vouchers. However, the Sixth Circuit Court agreed to delay its decision until the U.S. Supreme Court decided whether or not to hear the case.

The U.S. high court voted 5-4 in November 1999 to stay an injunction against the program that had been issued by U.S. District Court Judge Solomon Oliver. Earlier in 1999, the Ohio Supreme Court had issued a decision upholding the same program on First Amendment grounds.

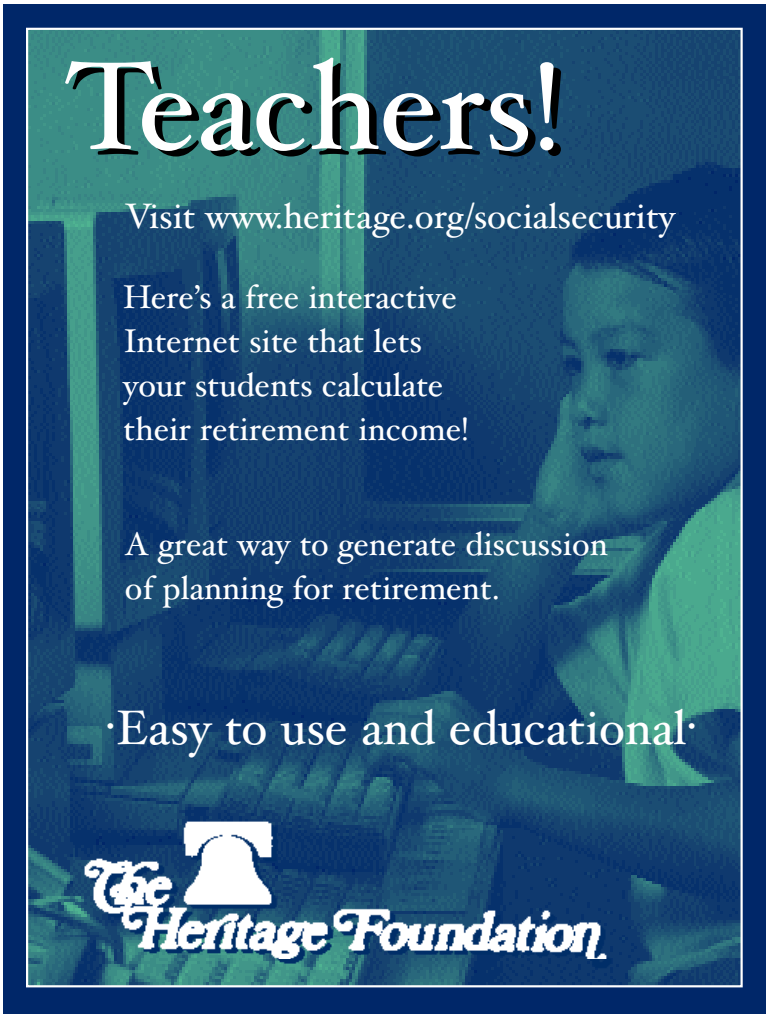
"This is the U.S. Supreme Court test case we've been waiting for to remove the constitutional cloud from school choice once and for all," said Clint Bolick, the Institute's lead lawyer for the school choice families. "This program provides a lifeline for children trapped in Cleveland's tragically inadequate public schools."

How inadequate are Cleveland's public schools? Only one in 14 students in the city's schools will graduate on time capable of reading and performing math at grade level; the high school graduation rate is less than 50 percent; and this year, the schools failed all but three of 27 of the state standards for student performance. Last year, they failed all 27.

The program directly affects the education of almost 4,000 low-income Cleveland schoolchildren, with another 1,000 children scheduled to enter the program in the fall. Students are provided with vouchers worth up to $2,250 a year, or about one-third of what the city's public schools spend per student. A majority of the Justices in the Sixth Court were troubled by the fact that no public schools chose to participate in the choice program, which meant the vouchers were redeemed mainly at religious schools since they formed a large majority of the schools that had chosen to participate.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has established a clear standard that when aid to students is allocated in a neutral manner and is available to both secular and religious schools, the program is constitutional," noted David J. Owsiany, president of the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions, headquartered in Columbus. "The Cleveland plan meets the test set out by the U.S. Supreme Court in previous cases, so we can expect the Cleveland Scholarship Program to be upheld."

David Zanotti, chairman of the School Choice Committee, also looked forward to the U.S. Supreme Court's dismissal of "the inaccurate and politically motivated claims of the ACLU against this program and parental choice in education."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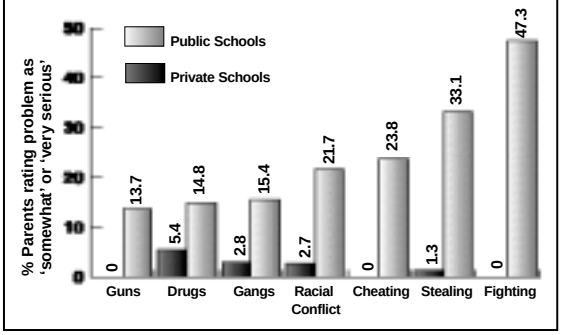
Choice Parents Find Far Fewer Problems in Private Schools



VOUCHERS continued from page 1

Overall, parents whose children received vouchers gave their children's schools an A- grade; parents whose children stayed in public schools gave their schools only a C+.

"Parents of children in private schools are very satisfied with their new schools, both generally and in regards to specific aspects of a child's educational environment—academic rigor, discipline, safety, and the values taught by the school," report Harvard University researchers Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell in their May 2001 report, "An Evaluation of the Children's Scholarship Fund."

Peterson and Campbell found that private schools are smaller, classes are smaller, and students report far fewer disruptions caused by other students—even though there's no evidence private schools turn away "problem" students. Parents are less likely to encounter problems like fighting, gangs, stealing, and cheating in their child's private school. Parents also report they are more likely to be treated with respect by teachers in private schools.

Private schools are also more likely to lack the facilities and programs that most public schools have, such as a nurse's office, cafeteria, guidance counselor, music program, and special programs for advanced learners and students with learning disabilities. A notable exception, said Peterson and Campbell, is the availability of individual tutors for students—a resource private schools are more likely than public schools to have.

Despite the disparity in resources and programs, 73 percent of parents of students with learning disabilities reported the private schools met their child's particular learning needs "very well," compared to only 30.1 percent of parents with comparable students in public schools.

"We can conclude that the Children's Scholarship Fund has had a measurably positive effect on the educational experiences of its recipients," the researchers stated. "And based on test score data collected in previous evaluations, it is plausible to speculate that the educational improvements cited by CSF parents will lead to improved academic performance—and thus improve prospects for the future success—of their children."

Philanthropists Ted Forstmann and John Walton formed the Children's Scholarship Fund in 1998, putting up $100 million of their own money and looking for matching donors to create a tuition fund of up to $200 million to offer private school scholarships* of $600 to $1,600 to children in needy families. Although the needy families were required to put up an additional $1,000 a year for tuition, CSF received 1.25 million applications nationwide for 40,000 scholarships.

The survey, conducted under the auspices of Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance, is the first evaluation of a large-scale national voucher program designed to help low-income parents send their children to the private school of their choice. Previous studies had been conducted on students in three potentially unrepresentative cities—New York City, Washington, DC, and Dayton, Ohio—and questions had been raised about whether the results could be generalized to the nation as a whole. The new survey indicates they can, since the survey results parallel those from studies of the individual cities.

Previous evaluations of students in CSF programs also found that, after two years in the program, African-American students who switched from public to private schools scored 6.3 National Percentile Ranking points higher than those who remained in public schools, although no gains or losses were found for other racial and/or ethnic groups. One-year results from another CSF program, in Charlotte, North Carolina, showed a similar gain of 6 percentile points among predominantly African-American students.

Significantly, the 6.3 NPR point gain from exercising a choice of schools is larger than the 4.9 NPR point gain reported from the well-known Tennessee experiment that reduced class size from 24 to 16. The gain from using a voucher is roughly one-third of the gap in test scores between black and white students.

"If the remaining two-thirds could be closed in subsequent years of elementary and secondary schooling, the social impact would be of great significance," noted Peterson and Campbell. They also pointed out that "the cost-benefit ratio for the CSF intervention was much larger than the Tennessee class-size intervention, which would cost hundreds of billions of dollars to introduce nationally."

The survey was conducted at the end of the first school year in which CSF scholarships were used, 1999-2000, and involved over 2,300 applicants and 850 children in applicant families. Some applicants were awarded scholarships and subsequently sent their children to private schools; other applicants did not receive scholarships and their children remained in public schools.

For the evaluation, the researchers employed the methodology of a randomized field trial, a common experimental design in the testing of medical and surgical treatments where patients are randomly assigned to a treatment group or control group. Since the voucher-seeking students were assigned to private or public schools based on a random lottery draw, any subsequent differences between the students can be attributed to the effect of receiving a voucher and transferring to a private school.

Although opponents of school choice have charged that allowing parents to choose schools for their children could lead to separatism and divisiveness, the CSF survey found no differences between public and private school students in their levels of political tolerance or political knowledge.

For more information...

WWW The 75-page report by Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell, "An Evaluation of the Children's Scholarship Fund," is available at the Web site of Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance at **www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg**. A six-page Executive Summary also is available. While statistical data provide several measures of the wide difference between public and private schools, it is only by reading the comments of parents in the full report that a real appreciation can be gained of the huge cultural divide between the two school systems regarding the expectations each has of its students.

* The CSF scholarships are referred to here as "vouchers" since—apart from the fact the scholarships are privately funded—they function in the same way as a publicly funded voucher.

For more information…

WWW about Parents in Charge, including details of the SWR Worldwide poll, "American Attitudes in Education," visit the PIC website at **www.parentsincharge.org**.

Forstmann Launches New Campaign

Children's Scholarship Fund co-founder Ted Forstmann earlier this year launched a new national, nonprofit organization called Parents in Charge to encourage a wider debate about the real problems and possibilities of the American K-12 educational system.

Backed by a recent survey showing that almost 82 percent of Americans believe parents—not the government—should be in charge of their children's education, PIC will undertake a national campaign to provide information on the value of a market-based education system in expanding educational opportunities for all families.

"In America, people are free to make all sorts of decisions in every other area of their lives except education," said Forstmann at the National Press Club in Washington, DC in April. "We are here today," he continued, "because we believe that parents should be in charge of their children's education: deciding where their children go to school, who teaches them, and what they learn."

Martin Luther King III, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and PIC board member, agreed, noting the one-supplier system of public education had become "a huge bureaucracy" which must be challenged. Fairness demands that "every child, not just the rich, has access to an education that will help them achieve their dreams," he declared.

"It's time to let education look like the rest of America," added Forstmann. "The democratic principles of freedom, competition, and choice should be applied to K through 12 education just as they are to our university system, which is the envy of the world."

Other PIC board members and co-chairs include Joseph A. Califano, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; Dr. Guy Doud, former National Teacher of the Year; William J. Bennett, former Reagan Secretary of Education; Erskine B. Bowles, former White House Chief of Staff; Rev. Floyd H. Flake, Pastor, Allen AME Church; The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger; U.S. Senator John McCain; The Honorable Andrew Young; and Washington, DC grandmother Rose Blassingame, who is putting her three grandchildren through private school with assistance from the Children's Scholarship Fund.

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STUDY:

Student-Centered Learning Ineffective

But researchers disavow significance of their findings

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

A recent evaluation of a class-size reduction program in Wisconsin has concluded that teacher-centered learning is clearly more effective than student-centered learning.

A team led by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor Alex Molnar analyzed the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, which reduces class size to 15 in grades 1-3 at an annual cost of $55 million. The researchers found significant achievement improvements among students in the smaller classes, with almost all of the gain occurring in first grade.

Not all reduced-size classes posted achievement gains, however. In seeking to explain why some reduced-size first-grade classrooms were higher-achieving while others were lower-achieving, the researchers concluded in a December 2000 report that teaching style made the difference. Apparently uncomfortable with that politically incorrect conclusion, the researchers then disavowed the significance of their findings and defended the instructional methods of lower-achieving teachers over those of the higher-achieving teachers.

"It should be noted that although the teaching of lower-achieving teachers jeopardizes achievement as measured by standardized tests, over time the goals and methods of the lower-achieving teachers may not be harmful, and may, indeed be helpful," write the researchers. "If the goals of thinking and problem-solving are realized, students will be served in the future even though the attainment of basics is delayed."

The instruction in SAGE classrooms was predominantly teacher-centered. However, in lower-achieving first-grade SAGE classrooms, teachers were found to emphasize personal development and to regard the acquisition of basic skills and fundamental concepts as secondary to the enjoyment of learning. "The teaching methods they preferred were hands-on activities, cooperative group work, problem-solving tasks, and in general, child-centered experiential learning in which the teacher serves as a facilitator," noted the researchers.

By contrast, teachers in higher-achieving first-grade SAGE classrooms were found to emphasize basic skills and processes through modeling, drill, and practice. They preferred highly structured, goal-directed classrooms with established routines where learning proceeded at a quick pace. Large amounts of time were spent on monitoring learning and understanding, with students required to display knowledge and skills. When those teachers used student-centered activities, "they [used] them in a teacher-centered way."

While teachers in lower-achieving classrooms generally managed students in a "permissive and inconsistent" manner, classroom management of teachers in higher-achieving classrooms was firm and decisive, "so that students are engaged in intended academic pursuits."

Since the teaching effect apparently was large enough to be noticed over and above the effect of class-size reduction, the Molnar team's findings tend to support the view of Tennessee statistician William Sanders, who contends that class size and other factors such as poverty "all pale into triviality in the face of teacher effectiveness." The UWM researchers, however, concluded that class size is the most important factor.

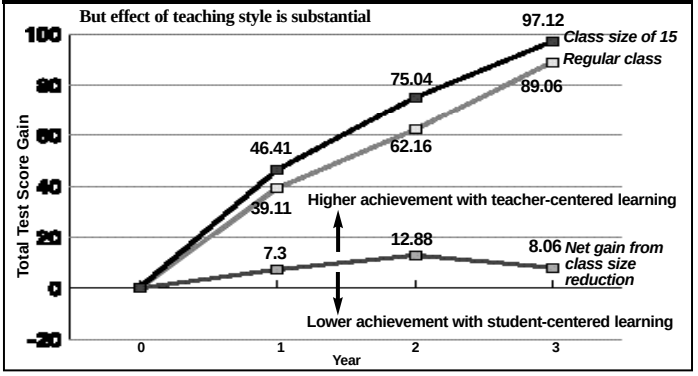
"Making classes smaller is the first step. Helping teachers improve their teaching is the second step," the researchers declared. Their report, however, omits the data necessary to reach that conclusion, i.e., the test score difference between higher-achieving and lower-achieving first-grade classrooms, and whether the difference is comparable to the test score difference between regular and reduced-size classrooms.

Since class-size reduction is such an expensive reform, Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency asks: "Why not implement the inexpensive instructional reform first, in the larger classrooms, then observe the effects of class-size reduction on the margins?"

For more information…

WWW The SAGE report is available at the Web site of the Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, **http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CERAI/documents/cerai-00-34.html**.

Reducing Class Size Boosts SAGE Test Scores



Teacher Union Lists Top 10 Voucher Supporters

Not included: Poor parents dissatisfied with public schools

If you're "very wealthy" and provide financial support for school vouchers to help children get a better K-12 education, there's a good chance you were considered for inclusion in the National Education Association's article, "Ten Reasons to Speak Out for Public Schools" in the May 2001 issue of the teacher union's monthly magazine, *NEA Today*.

The issue featured a "Clip & Save" column offering the names of 10 leading pro-voucher advocates—"some very wealthy folks," according to the union—who were characterized generally as individuals involved in an "anti-public education assault." The list obviously excluded the primary beneficiaries of school vouchers: low-income families dissatisfied with their assigned public schools.

"Never, never stop speaking out for public education," *NEA Today* urges its teacher union members. "There are some very wealthy folks out there—many of whom work together—who fuel America's pro-voucher movement."

Here's how the teacher union characterized these children's advocates:

#1. John Walton
Wal-Mart heir Walton is considered by the teacher union to be the voucher "movement's most prolific giver," providing seed money to CEO America and $2 million to last November's voucher initiative in Michigan. According to the NEA, "Walton bankrolls a massive private voucher program along with financier Ted Forstmann and runs a charter school management company."

#2. Ted Forstmann
Wall Street financier Forstmann "recently funded a multi-million-dollar ad campaign attacking public education," according to the NEA. The description continues: "Forstmann wants to scrap public schools in favor of an ATM-like system that would dispense taxpayer-funded vouchers" to private schools "run by anyone who wanted to start one."

#3. Tim Draper
NEA Today points out the California initiative supported by Silicon Valley venture capitalist Draper would give publicly funded vouchers "to children from even the wealthiest families."

#4. Dick DeVos
According to the NEA, DeVos and his wife Betsy are conducting an "anti-public education assault" using "a skewed report" to claim a high failure rate for Michigan's public schools.

#5. The Bradley Foundation
NEA Today points out that The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation "makes generous gifts" to Milwaukee's privately funded voucher program, to voucher researcher Paul Peterson of Harvard University, and to the pro-voucher legal group, the Institute for Justice.

"10 leading pro-voucher advocates…were characterized [by *NEA Today*] generally as individuals involved in an 'anti-public education assault.'"

#6. James Leininger
Leininger provides most of the financial support for the Horizon privately funded voucher program in San Antonio, Texas, which the NEA claims is "draining money" from the local public schools.

#7. J. Patrick Rooney
Insurance company executive Rooney created one of the first privately funded voucher programs and took the idea national with CEO America. Rooney also played a key role in other pro-voucher groups, including the American Education Reform Council and the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation.

#8. Milton Friedman
According to the NEA, economist Friedman uses his foundation to supplement four decades of voucher advocacy with support for ad campaigns, conferences, publications, think tanks, and advocacy groups to promote "alternatives" to public schools.

#9. Richard Mellon Scaife
With four family foundations, *NEA Today* reports, Scaife provides support for a variety of groups that promote vouchers and tuition tax credits: think tanks, private voucher-dispensing organizations, and public interest law firms.

#10. New Benefactors
The NEA lists the following as "new benefactors" for the voucher movement: Univision CEO Jerrold Perenchio, former Circuit City CEO Richard Sharp, Wolverine Gas & Oil CEO Sidney Jansma, Domino's Pizza founder Thomas Monaghan, and the computer company Compuware.

By contrast . . .
NEA Today also reported that the union helps underwrite what it characterizes as "independent" research into issues of interest to the union. Thus, the NEA funds studies on vouchers, class size reduction, and for-profit education at the Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which is headed by Alex Molnar.

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confirming measure, states would have to show progress on either the fourth or eighth grade assessment.

Points of strong contention over how tests would be administered and interpreted, and how a school's failure would be defined, remain. The final details may not be known until a House-Senate conference committee reaches agreement and President Bush signs the bill.

Spending Gets a Boost

Meanwhile, the Bush administration wooed Democratic liberals like Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Rep. George Miller of California, the ranking minority members on the education committees, by agreeing to boost federal education spending.

The House sought $24 billion in spending through the ESEA, a 29 percent increase. Senate Democrats wanted even more . . . despite the failure of some $150 billion in ESEA spending over the past 35 years to produce much by way of documented results.

"The bill is not perfect," said Miller. "But I think this bill, in its current form, represents a major step forward."

Overall, the U.S. Department of Education would receive a 22 percent budget increase, double what Bush had proposed. New Secretary of Education Rod Paige has vowed to tighten fiscal management at the department, where recent audits have exposed an inability to account for $450 million of spending over the past three years.

Conservatives Wage Floor Battle

The stripping of parental choice and block grants from the 987-page "No Child Left Behind" bill provoked the ire of six conservative Republicans in the House, who led a fight to restore the provisions in floor votes: Bob Schaffer (Colorado), Pete Hoekstra (Michigan), Jim DeMint (South Carolina), Tom Tancredo (Colorado), Mark Souder (Indiana), and Lindsey Graham (South Carolina).

Schaffer, founder of a charter school in Colorado, commented that "the President came out with a good idea predicated on an ambitious balance of accountability, dramatic flexibility being devolved to the states, and parental choice so kids could option out of the public school monopoly. That balance has been ruined."

More than 50 citizens' activist groups—among them, Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, Citizens for a Sound Economy, and the National Taxpayers Union—declared their opposition to the Bush bill after it had been substantially amended.

After the defeat of parental choice, Hoekstra, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Select Education, formed a conservative/liberal coalition in an attempt to eliminate the federally mandated testing. The proposal failed by a vote of 255-173. Hoekstra argued that school superintendents were not looking for yet another set of marching orders from Washington, and that the federal government's role "ought to be to audit the results, not to mandate."

John Boehner (R-Ohio), chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, opposed Hoekstra's proposal, saying "regular testing ensures that states and local schools are held accountable to parents, and it's the centerpiece of President Bush's education reform plan. This amendment would have struck at the very heart of the President's accountability proposal."

"The principal element of the Bush plan surviving committee and House floor votes was a federally mandated system of testing …"

Silver Lining for Reform

Some school choice advocates saw silver linings in what remained of the original Bush reform blueprint.

Analysts at the Institute for Justice, which is defending voucher recipients in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Florida, noted "the White House was able to secure agreement that children in failing schools can use their funds for private supplemental services, including religious providers. Given that Title I portability has never previously done well in Congress, this is a significant step forward."

Under the remaining accountability provisions, children in failing schools would be able to transfer to better-performing public schools right away. After three years, schools still failing would be required to offer families the option of private tutoring or after-school remedial programs. With yet another year of failure, the schools would have to reorganize as public charter schools or bring in new leadership and teachers.

Several measures to promote choice via tax credits and demonstration voucher programs also were in the works, and the White House had indicated its support. The legislation contains reforms of bilingual education intended to ensure that children limited in their English proficiency are not left to languish indefinitely in non-English native-language instruction.

In addition, a Reading First provision will direct funds to schools that use proven methods of reading instruction, based on scientific research. In practical terms, this means more use of phonics. (See accompanying article, "Bush Says Reading Is Job 1," page 1.)

"The stripping of parental choice and block grants from the 987-page 'No Child Left Behind' bill provoked the ire of six conservative Republicans in the House …"

Asking Too Much?

Veteran education analyst Myron Lieberman, a supporter of a competitive education industry, reminded disappointed reformers that under the decentralized American system, shaping K-12 education is not among a President's basic duties.

"It is unrealistic," Lieberman wrote in a column for the Education Policy Institute, "to think that a President, who is responsible for national security, foreign policy, and leadership on health care and social security, should regard education, a service for which the federal government contributes only 7 percent of the funding, as his highest priority."

Still, many conservatives find the dismissal of spending flexibility for the states and choice reforms for families particularly difficult to swallow when federal education spending is being increased so dramatically.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is rholl1176@yahoo.com.

Voucher Programs Around the World

Use is common in European and OECD Countries

BY HARRY ANTHONY PATRINOS

Although there has been limited success in establishing government-financed school voucher experiments in the K-12 education system in the United States, the use of vouchers and voucher-like programs as mechanisms for enhancing parental choice in the education sector is common in many countries around the world.

While some of the more direct school assistance mechanisms—for example, France's direct assistance to Catholic schools—would not pass constitutional muster in the United States, the experiences of other countries with different voucher policies and programs provides a rich source of school choice policy options for consideration by U.S. lawmakers.

Governments around the world recognize the importance of education, and in most countries the state is both the major financier and provider of education. However, government efforts to expand schooling have not reached all members of society equally.

While governments may have an interest in promoting and financing the market for education, it does not necessarily follow that the public sector has a role in providing that education. In many countries, there are other providers of education, such as church schools, home schools, and private schools, both for-profit and not-for-profit.

By extending financing to these other education providers through vouchers or grant programs, governments would give all parents, regardless of income, the opportunity to participate more fully in their child's education by choosing the school that is right for them.

Many countries use vouchers and voucher-like programs such as stipends and capitation grants to enhance school choice. The use of these mechanisms in the education sector is common in Europe and member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Here are some examples of voucher programs currently operating in different countries.

SWEDEN

In the early 1980s, less than 1 percent of Swedish children attended private schools, even though half of the private schools did not charge fees and citizens felt the centralized public schooling system was monochrome and unresponsive.

A series of reforms in the early 1990s introduced greater parental influence through the devolution of school funding and management.

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For more information…

WWW visit the global education investment information facility at **www.worldbank.org/edinvest**.

New school enrollment rules allowed money to follow students, and municipalities were required to provide capitation grants to each private school equal to 85 percent of the public school cost. This new funding system enabled nearly 90 percent of the private schools to be free from charging fees. As a result, enrollments in private schools continue to grow, more than doubling in recent years to reach almost 3 percent of total enrollments.

The Nacka municipality, outside Stockholm, has created a particularly effective voucher system. Each year, parents are given a catalog profiling all the local schools plus a voucher that is to be handed over to the school of their choice. (Sweden, incidentally, is one of the few countries where an actual physical voucher is used.)

Parents who do not choose a school are contacted by some of the closest schools to encourage an active choice. Active choice also is promoted by requiring parents to present a new voucher before the first, fourth, and seventh grade even if the child is attending the same school. Private and public schools alike follow the national curriculum.

The competition this has caused between schools for pupils has resulted in more efficient allocations of funds and clearer institutional focus.

DENMARK

Denmark has a long tradition of private schooling. In 1814, government legislation made seven years of education compulsory. However, "compulsory education" was loosely defined, and people remained free to educate their children as they saw fit as long as children received instruction in the principal subjects. Continuing in this tradition, any group of parents today can claim public funding by declaring themselves a private school if they have at least 28 students.

Most private schools in Denmark are religious institutions. The state preserves their religious freedom by fully funding all schools that meet the following requirements:

- Teachers are licensed;
- A core curriculum prescribed by the state is taught; and
- Students meet quantified academic standards.

All schools and universities in Denmark receive grants according to the number of students enrolled in the institution. The state allocates grants to private schools corresponding to approximately 80 percent of the total expenditure of the schools. It is assumed centrally that private schools are less costly than public ones, and private schools are mandated to charge at least some fee to parents. This is the Danes' way of ensuring parental participation, since the Ministry of Education does not have school inspectors.

About 12 percent of all Danish children attend a private school, and this percentage has been increasing in recent years.

NEW ZEALAND

Since the late 1980s, the New Zealand education system has undergone sweeping reforms that have fundamentally altered the shape of the public school sector. One of the key reforms shifted the responsibility for governing and managing schools away from central control and towards community control.

The reforms also established a system whereby higher funding levels are provided to schools with students from low-income families. While the bulk of overall funding for schools is related to the number of students enrolled, fully 7 percent of operational funding is income-targeted.

New Zealand also has introduced two different voucher programs targeted at low-income families. The first of these, Targeted Individual Entitlement (TIE), was introduced in 1995. The second, a variant on TIE, was introduced in 1999 and is specifically targeted at New Zealand's indigenous population, the Maori.

THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch education system has been decentralized and demand-driven since 1917. Almost 70 percent of schools in the Netherlands are administered and governed by private school boards. Public and private schools are funded by the government on an equal footing, and most parents have a choice of several schools near their homes.

Parental choice has spurred some schools to develop a unique profile and to improve the education they offer. While schools are free to determine what is taught and how, the Ministry of Education does impose a number of statutory quality standards. The Education Inspectorate is charged by the Minister of Education with supervising the manner in which schools fulfill their responsibilities.

In recent years, there has been a trend towards greater autonomy and decentralization. Many central government powers have been transferred to the level of the individual school. Central government control is increasingly confined to broad policy-making and to creating the right conditions for the provision of quality education. Institutions are being given greater freedom in the way they allocate their resources and manage their own affairs, although they still answer to government for their performance and policies.

Vouchers and Voucher-like Programs in European and OECD Countries

COUNTRY	MECHANISM
Australia	Assistance to private schools
Belgium	Students choose among public schools and "free" schools (Catholic)
Canada	Capitation grants and assistance to private schools
Czech Republic	Assistance to private schools
England	Assistance to private schools
France	Private schools (Catholic) receive subsidies from government
Holland	National, universal voucher
Hungary	Parental financing to their choice of public and private schools
Japan	Assistance to private schools
Netherlands	Capitation grants
New Zealand	Higher unit level of funding for poorer students, targeted vouchers
Poland	Assistance to private schools
Scotland	Students choose among public schools
Spain	Pre-school voucher experiment
Sweden	Capitation grants, school choice in some municipalities
United States	Voucher experiments: public, private, charter schools

Source: Patrinos, H.A., "Market Forces in Education," *European Journal of Education* 35(1):61-80 (2000); available on the Internet at www.worldbank.org/edinvest/Market_HP.html.

"Many countries use vouchers and voucher-like programs such as stipends and capitation grants to enhance school choice."

"The Dutch education system has been decentralized and demand-driven since 1917. Almost 70 percent of schools in the Netherlands are administered and governed by private school boards."

Schools receive extra funds to combat educational disadvantage. Additional funding is provided for schools in districts and regions with high numbers of underprivileged families.

CHILE

Chile is the only developing country to have a universal voucher program in place. In 1980, all school property was transferred from the education ministry to the municipalities and teachers became municipal employees. Each month, individualized grants were given to each municipality based on the number of students attending class in the municipality's schools. The municipal authorities also fund student attendance at subsidized private schools, which parents can choose. There also are private schools operating outside of the voucher system, which do not receive any public funding.

In the short run, the introduction of Chile's voucher program led to large numbers of schools converting from paid-private to subsidized-private, thereby increasing government-financed education spending. However, as time passed, reductions in the real value of the voucher led to paid-private schools regaining their previous market share.

Subsidized-private schools have proven to be slightly more cost-effective than municipal schools. While test scores are similar in municipal and subsidized-private schools after controlling for socioeconomic status, unit costs are lower in the subsidized-private schools. However, to ensure that central government grants are used as intended, there are severe penalties, including personal liability, for misappropriating government funds.

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READING continued from page 1

plan's launching, a report issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that over one-third of the nation's fourth graders were rated "below basic" in reading in 2000. The gap between the lowest-performing students—typically minority and poor students—and the highest-achieving students has widened since 1992, despite significant effort and resources expended to narrow it. (See "NAEP Reading Scores Tell a Grim Tale," *School Reform News*, June 2001.)

Over the past few months, Congressional Democrats and Republicans have feuded over how to address several cornerstone issues in the President's education blueprint—notably school choice, testing, and accountability—and also over funding levels for various programs. Several of the President's proposals have been watered down or removed altogether from House and Senate versions of the ESEA bill.

Smooth Sailing for Reading

By contrast, the Reading First initiative, which would establish an unprecedented federal focus on the teaching of reading, particularly for students in grades K-3, is widely popular. Even its focus on research-proven phonics—which usually raises the ire of "whole language" proponents—has, so far, gone uncontested in Congress.

Reading First aims to have all U.S. students reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. It would provide states and school districts with federal funds for professional development, rigorous diagnostic assessments, tutors, parent-focused programs, and instructional materials. Along with a companion "Early Reading First" proposal, which promotes pre-literacy programs for preschoolers, the Bush plan may spell the end of a decades-long emphasis on whole language as the primary means of teaching students to read.

One person who is credited with restoring the public's faith in phonics-based reading programs is the appropriately named Reid Lyon, who has headed up several years' worth of scientific research on reading instruction at the National Institutes of Health. While governor, Bush turned to Lyon to help design a Texas statewide reading program; as President, Bush is leaning heavily on Lyon to see his federal program through.

"The successful translation of scientific research to practice in Texas, which reduced the number of poor and minority students having reading difficulties, affirmed the President's commitment to educational practices based on high-quality scientific evidence," explained Lyon, who is serving as an informal advisor to Bush.

One of Lyon's first charges was to recruit several top-tier officials to orchestrate the administration of Reading First and other K-12 federal programs. Those tapped include Susan Neuman, director of the University of Michigan's Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, who has been nominated to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education; and Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, psychology department chairman at SUNY Stony Brook, nominated to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Research and Improvement.

According to Lyon, both nominees reflect the President's commitment to finding leaders with strong scientific and content backgrounds, "rather than simply filling administration positions on political grounds."

Fewer Special Ed Students

Lyon believes the effective teaching of reading to young students will not only help reduce the achievement gap, but will also lower the number of students assigned to special education programs.

In a paper recently published by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Progressive Policy Institute, Lyon contends the effective teaching of reading to very young students could reduce the number of "learning disabled" students placed in special education programs by up to 70 percent.

With special education costs reaching $60 billion a year, the $900 million Bush wants to direct towards early literacy in 2002 reflects a smart investment, explains House of Representatives' Committee on the Workforce and Education staffer Bob Sweet, who is working closely with the Reading First legislation. He also notes the focus on early literacy translates to success in all other areas.

"Over the past 35 years, [the federal government has] funded billions and billions of dollars in programs that were ineffective," said Sweet. "This is a way to turn the nose of the ship in the right direction."

Kelly Amis is program director for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, DC. Her email address is KLAmis@aol.com.

Taking a Fresh Look at Special Education

photo/Mary Schroeder

Don Winkle, chairman of Ford Credit Company, sits with Jennifer Craig at Eton Academy, a school for children with learning disabilities in Birmingham, Michigan. This chief executive can relate to his audience. He is plagued by learning disabilities himself. It is difficult for him to read, write, pronounce words correctly, and dial a phone. Winkler uses red clown noses to help himself and others from taking themselves too seriously.

BY KELLY AMIS

If early signs are predictive, the bipartisanship President George W. Bush actively nurtured during Congressional consideration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) may be more readily available when Congress takes up the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).

While the IDEA will not be up for reauthorization for another year, two Washington think-tanks recently met in the aisle to collaborate on a preliminary review of the special education issues Congress will likely address.

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (TBF), led by former Reagan administration official Chester E. Finn Jr., and the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), a "New Democrat" organization whose education director, Andrew Rotherham, once advised President Bill Clinton, recently released a volume of 14 papers by commissioned authors who investigate myriad questions surrounding the IDEA. The report is called *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century*.

The 25 year-old IDEA provides special services to some 6 million students nationwide at an estimated cost of $35 to $60 billion annually—between $5,800 and $10,000 per child. While "many people endorse special education's intentions and hail its accomplishments, few are happy with how it's actually working," explains Finn.

But few are willing to challenge the IDEA's precepts for fear of being labeled insensitive or worse; the program is often considered the untouchable "third rail" of education reform.

> ***"Rethinking Special Education* is intended to jumpstart the process of reauthorizing the IDEA…"**

Bringing Research to Bear

Rethinking Special Education is intended to jumpstart the process of reauthorizing the IDEA by presenting a wide range of studies, findings, and recommendations to inform policymakers about the successes and failures of the program. For example, the report finds

- Millions of students are improperly identified as "learning disabled" when in fact they simply were not properly taught to read at a young age.
- Race is a key factor in determining who is enrolled in special education programs.
- IDEA creates "perverse" incentives for parents to want their children in special education programs.
- Standards-based reforms are prompting some schools to assign more students to special education classes so as to exclude them from participating in proficiency tests.

For more information…

WWW The full text of *Rethinking Special Education* is available at the Web sites of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, **www.edexcellence.net**, and the Progressive Policy Institute, **www.ppionline.org**.

Full Funding or Fair?

The program's weaknesses notwithstanding, some members of Congress are eager to increase federal spending on IDEA sooner rather than later.

Senators Chuck Hagel (R-Nebraska) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) successfully amended the ESEA on the Senate floor on May 3 to increase the federal contribution to IDEA by $2.5 billion each year over the next six years. That funding increase would bring IDEA, for the first time, to the full amount Congress originally authorized for the program in 1975.

President Bush and Education Secretary Rod Paige both have indicated they would prefer that the "full funding" debate take place as part of the IDEA reauthorization process, not before. Congress left the Hagel/Harkin measure out of the budget bill that would have provided the funds, making it unlikely the measure would remain in the final ESEA reauthorization.

The Fordham Foundation/Progressive Policy Institute report supports the notion of the federal government paying its fair share of special education costs. The report also recommends, however, that any increase in federal funding be accompanied by significant changes in the structure of IDEA. Among the recommendations offered in *Rethinking Special Education*:

- moving away from a "one size fits all" mentality and encouraging innovation and flexibility in the provision of services;
- making special education "performance based" and removing the strong emphasis on compliance with regulations;
- focusing on prevention and early intervention whenever possible; and
- streamlining the assortment of special education categories into a few broad groupings.

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Education Industry News

A sampling of education industry news from The Education Economy, a weekly publication of the market research firm Eduventures.com, which conducts research on the pre-K-12, post-secondary, corporate training, and consumer markets worldwide. This copyrighted material is used by permission of Eduventures.com, Inc.

Has the momentum generated by the for-profit education sector weakened? Consider recent industry news:

- several company announcements of staff reductions;
- an estimated 30 percent write-down, totaling more than $5.1 billion, of 1999-2000 investments;
- a drop of 70 percent in first quarter 2001 venture capital investments compared to a year ago.

But Adam Newman of Eduventures.com sees several factors pointing to the industry's long-term success.

Says Newman, "today's contraction of venture capital in the education space is a healthy event; similar to naturally occurring forest fires that strengthen an ecosystem by clearing away excessive overgrowth, the thinning of the number of vendors in crowded markets and/or with unsustainable business models ultimately serves to strengthen private sector education."

Beacon Educational Management Plans Share Sale

On May 8, **Beacon Educational Management, Inc.**, a provider of school management services to charter and district schools, announced plans to sell $33 million in shares.

www.beaconedu.com

Delisting Warning for LearningStar Corp.

On May 7, **LearningStar Corp.**, a developer of educational products for the pre-K-12 market, announced it received notification of possible delisting from Nasdaq due to failure to meet the requirement of an $18 million minimum public float market value. The company has requested a hearing from Nasdaq.

www.learningstarcorp.com

Riverdeep to Acquire Teacher Universe

On May 17, **Riverdeep Group**, a developer of K-12 learning solutions, announced it will acquire substantially all the assets of **Teacher Universe, Inc.**, a wholly owned subsidiary of **Knowledge Universe** that provides professional development and science curriculum resources for the K-12 market. In addition, Riverdeep and Knowledge Universe have announced a partnership to co-promote each other's products.

www.riverdeep.com / www.teacheruniverse.com

Scott Foresman Partners with TIE

On May 9, **Scott Foresman**, the elementary school publisher of **Pearson Education**, and **TIE**, a provider of computer-based learning information management systems, announced a partnership whereby TIE technology will power a co-developed electronic curriculum guide and assessment service for the Scott Foresman Reading programs for grades K-6.

www.scottforesman.com

Siboney Buys The Denali Project

On May 8, **Siboney Learning Group**, a publisher of educational software for the K-12 market, announced it acquired the publishing assets of **The Denali Project**, publisher of Summit Software, an instructional software program with over 900 integrated reading and mathematics lessons for grades 3-8.

www.siboney.com / www.denaliproject.com

TestU and Class.com Announce Partnership

On April 30, **TestU**, an online test preparatory company for the K-12 market, and **Class.com**, a provider of online courses for high school students, announced a strategic partnership. The partnership will leverage Class.com's course curriculum by providing clients with test preparatory services through TestU's Mini Test Prep Center.

www.testu.com / www.class.com

Tutor.com Acquires Real Time Learning

On May 14, **Tutor.com**, a provider of online tutoring for students, announced it acquired **Real Time Learning**, a provider of online tutoring services for public libraries, community-based organizations, and schools. Tutor.com will assume RTL's online tutoring contracts with public libraries and other organizations.

www.tutor.com / www.realtimelearning.com

Two Acquisitions by WRC Media

On May 10, **WRC Media, Inc.**, an educational publishing and media company for the K-12 market, announced it had acquired **Lindy Enterprises**, a developer of curriculum-based skills assessment and test preparation products. The company also announced it completed acquisition of **ChildU**, a provider of supplementary online curriculum for grades K-12.

www.wrcmedia.com

Zany Brainy Files for Chapter 11

On May 16, educational toy provider **Zany Brainy** announced it had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, attributing the decision to slow sales, a problematic acquisition of **Noodle Kidoodle, Inc.**, and a money-losing Internet venture with **Online Retail Partners**. Subject to bankruptcy court approval, Zany Brainy has secured $115 million debtor-in-possession financing from **Wells Fargo Retail Finance LLC**.

www.zanybrainy.com

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MindPlay Offers Free Reading Skills Test

Online program assesses reading level of student

Parents concerned about how well their children are learning to read in school can turn to a free online assessment tool to determine a student's reading level and detect any specific reading deficiencies: The Reading Evaluation, Assessment and Diagnostic System, or READS program, from MindPlay. The program also is available to schools on an annual subscription basis at rates ranging from $1.83 to $4.00 per student.

The READS test, available at www.mindplay.com, is applicable to grades 2-10 reading levels and assesses reading ability in terms of phonics skills and reading comprehension level. The phonics test requires the student to identify words and syllables that are read aloud by the Digital Teacher in the test program. The reading comprehension test requires the student to read stories and insert missing words from a list of possible choices.

The test typically requires 15 to 60 minutes, depending on the test-taker's skills, which are assessed on the following cognitive elements: reading comprehension, phonology, decoding, cipher knowledge, phonemic awareness, and the alphabetic principle. (See "How Do Children Read?" by Sebastian Wren, *School Reform News*, February 2001.) Each section of the test will automatically stop when it begins to exceed the test-taker's ability level. After the test is completed, MindPlay emails instructions to the test-taker for viewing the results online.

"The READS test . . . is applicable to grades 2-10 reading levels and assesses reading ability in terms of phonics skills and reading comprehension level."

Armed with information from the test, parents feel better prepared to talk to teachers about their child's specific reading deficits, says MindPlay CEO Judith Bliss.

One way of addressing those reading deficits is with another software program from MindPlay called *My Reading Coach*™, available for both home and school use. Using techniques developed by speech pathologist and veteran reading teacher Jim Larrabee, MindPlay's Digital Teacher, *My Reading Coach*™ provides phonics-based reading lessons that have been tested for the past five years on children, older students, prison inmates, people with learning disabilities, and non-native speakers.

"People can learn to read and understand anything they can hear and understand," says Larrabee. "The lessons on *My Reading Coach*™ bring their reading level up to their vocabulary level, whether that's the vocabulary of a seven-year-old or an adult."

Earlier this year, the program was used for 30 minutes a day by second-graders at Myers-Ganoung Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona. Before embarking on the program, 40 percent of the students were reading at the lowest reading levels. After 9 weeks, that percentage had dropped from 40 to 18, with a sharp increase in the number of students reading in the above-average range.

MindPlay reports that 95 percent of program users improve their reading the equivalent of one to five grade levels after 40 to 50 hours of lessons.

For more information...

WWW Information on MindPlay programs is available at the company's Web site at **www.mindplay.com**.

Information on the mechanism of reading is available at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's Web site for the Reading Coherence Initiative at **www.sedl.org/rci**.

The SEDL Web site also offers a Reading Assessment Database, which provides information on more than 150 reading assessment programs. It is located at **www.sedl.org/reading/rad/list.html**.

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Mass. Lawmakers Scramble to Preempt Voter Initiative

Possibility of bilingual ed ballot measure spurs action

BY DON SOIFER

Perhaps hearing the footsteps of a possible statewide bilingual education reform initiative approaching in their not-too-distant future, Massachusetts policymakers have hurried to pass reform measures they can point to as meaningful, thus preempting a citizen initiative. On May 15, the state legislature's Joint Education Committee held hearings to examine three legislative proposals currently under consideration.

Massachusetts law requires schools to offer bilingual education when at least 20 students in the district speak the same, non-English native language.

This spring, Dr. Rosalie Porter, a member of the Massachusetts Governor's Education Reform Review Commission, testified before the U.S. House of Representatives that Limited English Proficient students scored lower than mainstream students on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in all subjects and at all grade levels tested.

In an August 2000 READ Institute study she coauthored, Porter reported only one school district in the state had English learners who outscored mainstream students on any portion of the test: Chelsea fourth-grade English learners scored two points higher in math. Porter's study, "Bilingual Students and the MCAS: Some Bright Spots in the Gloom," also uncovered a number of significant problems in the Massachusetts Department of Education's data collection and reporting pertaining to English learners.

At the state House hearings, Senator Guy Glodis (D-Worcester) vigorously defended a proposal he authored, which would effectively end transitional bilingual education altogether in the Commonwealth and replace it with one-year intensive English immersion programs.

"Our children are not learning English because they are not being taught in English," Glodis testified. "The current system is not working. It's a disaster."

Glodis modeled his bill on laws approved as ballot referenda in California in 1998 and Arizona in 2000. The original 1998 legislation was written by California software entrepreneur Ron Unz, who led the initiatives in both states. Glodis has been in contact with Unz about a possible Massachusetts campaign and Unz—a Harvard University graduate—has indicated he would consider getting involved in such an effort.

House Minority Whip Mary Rogeness (R-Longmeadow) spoke on behalf of legislation she has sponsored that would require school districts to obtain parental consent before placing students in transitional bilingual education programs. Her proposal also would require bilingual teachers to be fluent in English and ease current state laws requiring districts to offer bilingual education.

However, it was the proposal from Representative Antonio Cabral (D-New Bedford) that received the widest praise from the hearing's participants. Touted as a "compromise" plan, its centerpiece calls for the creation of a new "bilingual structured immersion" education model for English learners as an alternative for school districts and parents. Instead of the English immersion programs implemented in California, Arizona, and elsewhere, the Cabral model would essentially mandate bilingual immersion where "30 percent of the day shall be conducted in the native [non-English] language of the student."

Reform advocates were heartened by the Cabral plan's insistence that school districts improve accountability for results and annually monitor the progress of Limited English Proficient students towards English fluency. State Commissioner of Education David Driscoll endorsed the bill, citing Cabral's understanding of the need to improve current bilingual programs and his apparent willingness to work with reformers to produce a bill acceptable to all sides.

But Glodis, who has raised the possibility of a 2002 ballot referendum to abolish bilingual education, was not impressed. Calling Cabral's proposal "a token attempt by the liberal left to appease real reformers," Glodis told the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* he was convinced there is "broad appeal" for such a referendum.

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org.

"Massachusetts policymakers have hurried to pass reform measures they can point to as meaningful."

For more information…

WWW The READ Institute study is available online at **www.ceousa.org/READ/mcas.html**.

Germain Aquino, 12, reads his report card. Aquino speaks little English, having emigrated from Mexico last fall. In schools such as Aquino's in Chicago, students face an array of language barriers—from students who speak little English to those who have had bilingual education for several years. *photo/Jose More-Chicago Tribune*

Nobel to Expand into Southern California

For-profit educator must meet demands of investors and parents

A few days before posting record third-quarter revenues from its current operations, the nation's largest non-sectarian operator of private schools, Nobel Learning Communities, Inc., announced plans to expand into the Southern California education market, opening a minimum of 12 schools within the next few years with a capacity to educate nearly 2,500 students. As well as its private school operations, Nobel also operates charter and special education schools.

"Nobel as a company is on the cutting-edge of the for-profit education industry," said A. Jack Clegg, chairman and chief executive officer of Nobel, which is based in Media, Pennsylvania. "We are meeting the demands of two bottom lines: those of our investors and our parents. We believe this dual focus differentiates us in the marketplace and defines our company."

Nobel Learning Communities currently educates more than 25,000 students and operates 170 private, special education, and charter schools in 15 states. It provides special education services to an additional 92 non-Nobel charter schools. The company's students score nearly two grade levels above national norms on standardized tests.

Nobel's new schools in California will be located in Orange, San Diego, Kern, San Luis Obispo, Riverside, Imperial, Santa Barbara, and San Bernardino Counties. Although the California Department of Education reports nearly 120,000 K-6 students already enrolled in private schools in those counties, Nobel believes the area has a shortage of affordable private education options.

"We have proven how successful our model can be in Northern California, and are confident that parents in Southern California will take advantage of our educational process in the same manner as their Northern counterparts," said John Frock, the company's executive vice president.

Frock said Nobel was working with a specialty real estate developer, Schoolhouse Development, to identify locations for building its first round of new pre-K and elementary schools, targeted to open in the summer of 2002. Schools built over the next few years will be pre-K stand-alone facilities and combination schools housing a pre-K, elementary, and special education school. The potential revenue from the new schools is expected to be in excess of $18 million annually.

"Our experience in the market has shown there is a growing demand for a high-quality, affordable alternative to the struggling California public elementary school system, and we plan on providing that alternative," said Clegg.

Record Revenues

On May 14, Nobel reported record revenues of $108.91 million for the nine months ended March 31, 2001, an 18.4 percent increase over prior year revenues of $92 million. The company also reported record revenues of $38.96 million for the third quarter 2001, a 17.6 percent increase over the revenues of $33.13 million for the comparable quarter in the prior year.

For the nine months ended March 31, 2001, same-school operating profit rose 16.3 percent to $13.85 million from $11.91 million in the comparable nine-month period during the prior year. For the three months ended March 31, 2001, same-school operating profit rose 10 percent to $5.39 million from $4.91 million in the prior year.

For the three months ended March 31, 2001, total school operating profits increased an additional $1.12 million—a 27 percent increase over the preceding quarter, ended December 31, 2000. The company attributed the increase to improved efficiencies in existing schools and increased profit in the 26 new schools added this fiscal year.

Although school operating profit increased, net income for the nine months was $909,000 or $.12 per share, down from $1.47 million, $.20 a share, a year earlier. The fall was due primarily to an increase in interest costs and professional fees, plus new school startup costs in the latest quarter, including pretax expense of $824,000 as a continuing effect from two Arizona schools acquired from TesseracT. But after absorbing the new school start-up losses, the company now had a solid foundation for the next school year, noted Clegg.

"We worked hard during the quarter to put in place effective management programs that lowered costs across our network while delivering the highest value in education today," said Clegg. "This is our mission and we are on course."

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Children First AMERICA

parental choice in education

July 2001

Children First America's 7th Annual Founders' Conference in DC

Celebrating School Choice Gains and the Impact of 90 Privately Funded Programs

This past May 2-3, more than 100 leaders from America's school choice movement came together in Washington, DC to attend *Children First America*'s 7th Annual Founders' Conference. They included *Children First America* program founders and others from more than 90 privately funded voucher programs across the nation. These state private initiatives represent half-a-billion dollars in charitable dollars invested over ten years to bring educational freedom to more than 100,000 low-income families.

The event also attracted some of the nation's top business and governmental leaders as well as a number of allied school choice organizations such as the Institute for Justice, Children's Scholarship Fund, Center for Education Reform, The Friedman Foundation, the American Education Reform Foundation, The Heritage Foundation, and the newly formed Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO). Moreover, groups such as DC Parents for School Choice and the Washington Scholarship Fund assisted to make the event a huge success through a rousing community dinner in inner city Washington attracting more than 500 area parents.

Of special note: This year's Founders' conference also set a record by drawing an unprecedented number of Program Directors from various privately funded voucher programs around the states. Thirty-five Directors from 28 programs plus Toronto and Washington, DC were in attendance including Directors from four newly forming organizations. Working together, they formalized a new affiliates network designed to improve communications, share ideas, and solve problems.

In this special insert, we recap our event in photographs and brief comments. It was a time of celebration, information, and special recognition for the people who work day in and day out for school choice.

Fritz S. Steiger
President and CEO

"Four Top Speakers Inspire Attendees"

Eugene Hickok

Former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, **Eugene Hickok** *(left), a nominee for Under Secretary of Education in the Bush administration, encouraged choice supporters to stay the course, reminding them much more can occur after the first 100 days of the Bush administration.*

Maurice McTigue

George Mason University's **Maurice McTigue** *(right), a veteran of New Zealand's fight to win school choice 16 years ago, recounted that nation's successful implementation of a full school choice for all children.*

Tim Hutchinson

U.S. Senator **Tim Hutchinson** *(above), Arkansas, updated conference attendees on the status of various school reform proposals, including those embracing various forms of school choice.*

C. Boyden Gray

C. Boyden Gray *(right), a founding member of the Washington Scholarship Fund, told participants about his role in starting a private voucher program and its importance in changing public sentiment.*

"Pennsylvania and Florida jump on Tax Credit Bandwagon, update on back page."

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Ideas Shared, Strategies Refined, Friendships Renewed, Vision Rewarded...

Bob Thompson (right) is presented the J. Patrick Rooney Authentic American Award *by Pat Rooney for steadfast support of the* Washington Scholarship Fund. *It recognizes that individual who exhibited uncommon vision and forethought in driving the formation and success of a privately funded voucher program.*

Fritz Steiger, left, president, Children First America, *congratulates John Kirtley, center, after being presented the* Virginia Manheimer Trustbuster Award *from Virginia Manheimer, right, a* Children First America *board member. John Kirtley is the founder of* CSF Tampa Bay *and serves on the board of directors of* Children First America *and* Floridians for School Choice. *The award is presented to an individual who has exhibited unusual characteristics in promoting competition in school choice, either through an idea or actions.*

L to R: Mike Watson, vice president for marketing and communications; Robert Aguirre, recipient of the The Private Voucher Administrator Award *(which in the future will be* The Robert Aguirre Private Voucher Administrator Award *by CFA Board decree); and Fritz Steiger, president,* Children First America. *Robert is the managing director of* CEO San Antonio *and* CEO Horizon *and a* Children First America *board member.*

Joe Robert, chairman of the Washington Scholarship Fund, *was the winner of the* Peter Flanigan Children First Award *(presented to an individual who has impacted the lives of children through school choice). Danny LaBry, right, executive director of* Washington Scholarship Fund, *accepted the award on behalf of Joe Robert from Peter Flanigan, left, chairman of the board,* Children First America.

Michael Watson, right, vice president of marketing and communications, Children First America, *presented* The John Fund Excellence in School Choice Reporting Award *to Matthew Miller, left, for his article* "A Bold Proposal to Fix City Schools" *published in* The Atlantic Monthly, *July 1999.*

Congressman Jeff Flake (AZ) and his wife at the VIP reception.

Clint Bolick of the Institute for Justice participates in one of the several panel discussions.

Photos used in this ad were taken by Pam Risdon of Cable Risdon Photography in Alexandria, VA.

Fritz Steiger (center) flanked by Isabelle and Jack McVaugh, founders of the Arizona School Choice Trust. The McVaughs have been regulars at all Founders' Conferences.

CFA President Fritz Steiger talks with Eugene Hickok, former Secretary of Education in Pennsylvania under Gov. Tom Ridge.

School Choice movement leaders: (L to R) Virginia Walden-Ford, Tina Dupree, and Virginia Manheimer.

Maurice McTigue of New Zealand is welcomed to the conference by CFA Chairman Peter Flanigan and Fritz Steiger, president and CEO.

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Founders' Meeting Concludes with "No Child Left Behind" Community Dinner and Rally in DC

Washington Scholarship Fund and DC Parents for School Choice Co-host

(Left) The Vermont Avenue Baptist Church provided the setting for an inspirational evening.

(Below) More than 500 school choice leaders and local parents met for dinner and a rally.

(Below) Local children's choirs offered a variety of entertainment for the evening.

(Left) A young local soloist wows the crowd.

(Right) CFA Director of Parent Initiatives, Ron Harris visits with a young guest.

(Left) Children and families of all ages enjoyed the dinner and entertainment.

(Above) Virginia Walden-Ford (DC Parents for School Choice) and Danny LaBry (Washington Scholarship Fund) presided over the event.

(Left) Ron Harris and Fritz Steiger with Children First America present The Parent Leadership Award to Virgina Walden-Ford for her tireless efforts to bring school choice to DC children.

(Right) Virginia Walden-Ford admires her award, The Parent Leadership Award.

(Right) Children First America awarded three private vouchers to three families in the course of the evening. The young recipients are shown here. These are more children who will not be left behind in schools that fail them.

Excerpts from Howard Fuller's Call to Action in DC

"Wasn't there a time when we knew that the next generation was going to be smarter than the previous generation? Can we say that today? Don't you feel the pain when we have to acknowledge that, unless we do something, far too many of the next generation will be dumber than us?"

"What makes public education public is that it operates in the public interest, and having 28 percent completion rates for black children is not in the public interest."

"The statistics are staggering: In Wisconsin, mirroring the national trend, the average ACT score for college-bound white seniors is 22.5, compared with only 17.4 for black students."

"Nationwide, the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that in reading, math, and science, whites are much more likely than blacks to be at 'proficient' or 'advanced' levels."

"How long will we as a people tolerate this? I don't know the answer, but what I do know is that the Black Alliance for Educational Options will do everything that we can to help our people fight back. We are declaring war against the conditions that lead to mis-education, the under-education and the non-education of our children. This has to stop now, not tomorrow, or next week, or next year, now!"

"The issue is not choice in America. It is who has it. Those with money already have it. Equity and access, through changing power arrangements, are the ways to engage our people in the practice of freedom. In our view, the realization of democracy is tied up in our struggle to educate our children. In the end, the more children we educate, the better our chances of sustaining and deepening the democracy."

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Directors of Privately Funded Voucher Programs Form Network

Thirty private voucher program (PVP) directors from 21 states, DC, and Toronto, Canada met prior to the kick-off of the Founders' Meeting to formalize a new Affiliates Network. The directors included representatives from 28 PVPs—four of which are currently in the formative stages. The affiliates network advisory board was introduced to the group and three members of that advisory board—Lesley Searcy of CSF Alabama, Trent Williamson with the Memphis Opportunity Scholarship Trust, and Troy Williamson of Educate New Mexico—led discussions on the successes and challenges of private voucher programs as well as suggestions for the development of an effective network. The next several months will see the new PVP Affiliates Network become operational.

(Below) Rene Davis, program director, Maine Children's Scholarship Fund*(R) provides information on the Maine program; Sr. Michelle Faltus, superintendent of Catholic Schools,* CSF Omaha *(L) is also pictured.*

(Above) Gene Pinkard, executive director, Capital Partners for Education *shares a success story on his scholarship/mentoring program that serves DC low-income high school students.*

(Right) David Salsibury, executive director, Children First Utah*, shares some of the challenges of launching a new statewide program.*

(Right) Donna Watson, director of private initiatives, Children First America*, welcomes the program directors.*

(Above) Lawrence Gunnells, executive director, CSF Arkansas*, has a suggestion on how to make the network effective for pvp directors around the country.*

(Above) A delegation from Racine, Wisconsin led by Stella Young (center) discusses starting a program with Mike Watson (R).

(Above) Suzanna Duvall, executive director, CSF Baltimore *(L) and ChamBria Henderson, executive director,* Arizona Scholarship Fund *(R) listen to the discussion.*

(Above) Troy Williamson, executive director, Educate New Mexico *(L) and Trent Williamson, executive director,* Memphis Opportunity Scholarship Trust *(R), lead a discussion on the "whats" and "hows"of a successful affiliates network.*

(Right) Mike Watson, vice president of marketing and communications, Children First America *(L), greets Joel Peppetti(R), coordinator,* Misciagna Challenge Scholarship Program *in Altoona/Johnstown, Pennsylvania.*

Florida and Pennsylvania Enact School Choice Tax Credits

School choice advocates won major victories in Florida and Pennsylvania this spring. Florida has passed a 100% dollar for dollar corporate tax credit for funds contributed to a qualifying SFO (student funding organization), with up to $50 million per year in credits allowed. SFOs will distribute vouchers not to exceed $3500 per child to qualifying children. For a child to qualify, he/she must be classified as economically disadvantaged; have applied and been accepted by an SFO; and been accepted by a participating private/parochial school. "This is a major step in the right direction and we will see many children gain access to quality schools as a result," remarked John Kirtley, Tampa businessman and CFA board member who helped lead the tax credit effort.

In addition, the Florida legislature has vastly expanded the educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Florida's 340,000 students who have IEP's (Individual Education Plans) will be able to obtain a voucher to attend any public, private, or parochial school of their parent's choosing. Any parent of a child with an IEP can now apply for a McKay Scholarship, named after the author of the bill. Pat Heffernan, president of Floridians for School Choice, says this bill has enormous potential: "Florida lawmakers saw this bill very simply. They wanted to give the parents of children with disabilities the greatest capacity to do what they thought best for them. Finally we had debate on what parental love could do for children, not on what vouchers would do to the schools. It's no wonder it got the support of both parties." Already, 180 private schools in Florida have said they will accept McKay scholarship students. The political leadership provided by Governor Jeb Bush, Senate President John McKay, Speaker Tom Feeney, Rep. Joe Negron, Sen. Ken Pruitt, and Rep. Carlos LaCasa and others has positioned Florida to become the leading state in providing education options for children, and they should be proud.

Meanwhile, Governor Tom Ridge had his relentless efforts on behalf of children rewarded when the Pennsylvania legislature passed legislation creating a tax credit for corporations to donate money to Scholarship Organizations. A corporation will receive a 75% tax credit for their donation. However, if a corporation provides a two-year commitment for equal or greater funding the second year, the tax credit will be 90%. Scholarship Organizations will provide scholarships for public and non-public school children to attend the school of their choice. The cap on this program is $30 million, with 66% ($20 million) guaranteed for scholarships. Scholarship organizations must be a non-profit, IRS registered 501c3 and distribute 80% of their funds for K-12 scholarships. In addition, the legislature created a tuition fund for children in grades 3 through 6 in need of remedial education. Dennis Giornio, Executive Director of the REACH Alliance noted that "the Governor and the Legislature have provided the business community with an important incentive to enable them to help children achieve their dreams and to succeed in life." Such students will receive tutorial grants worth up to $500 for remedial education, which can be redeemed at private learning centers or private schools. Special thanks go out to the tireless efforts of Governor Ridge and school choice supporters around the state.

Children First CEO *America* is the nation's leading school choice organization involved in establishing privately-funded voucher programs and parent awareness groups. *Children First* CEO *America's* mission is to promote parental choice in education through private tuition grants and tax funded options, giving all families the power to choose the K-12 school that best fulfills the hopes and dreams they have for their children. Contact us at: PO Box 330 • Bentonville, AR 72712
1-800-482-KIDS • E-mail: childrenfirstamerica@childrenfirstamerica.org.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE!
www.
childrenfirstamerica.org

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Charter School Facilities & Finance

The two biggest problems in charter school development have been identified as facilities and finance. With this new column, School Reform News *aims to bring its readers the newest ideas on solving these problems.*

Getting the Facility Ready for Students

BY MARK HOWARD

Once a charter school board has negotiated the lease or purchase of a specific parcel of property, the next step is the physical transition of the space or property into a facility that can be used for educational purposes. There are two options: renovating an existing building, and building a new facility from the ground up.

Before embarking on either of these paths, the charter school operator is reminded to ensure that existing zoning laws allow for an educational facility in either a renovation of existing space or the purchase of a vacant parcel of property.

"Once a charter school board has negotiated the lease or purchase of a specific parcel of property, the next step is the physical transition of the space or property into a facility that can be used for educational purposes."

Renovating an Existing Building

When negotiating the lease of an existing building, charter school operators should pay attention to the assignment of responsibility for any required renovations, since this can be divided between landlord and tenant. The intentions of each party should be carefully outlined in the lease agreement so there is *no* misunderstanding between landlord and tenant.

In general, the landlord will be responsible for any structural renovation of the building, and the tenant will be responsible for interior changes. In many cases, however, the tenant can induce the landlord to take responsibility for all of the necessary changes by allowing the landlord to increase the rent to obtain a payback of the dollars spent on improving the space for the tenant.

Developing a reasonable assessment of the renovation costs requires an architect; the addition of a competent architect to the charter school development team should be done early on. The architect will need to view the space as it currently exists in order to locate existing service lines for water, sewer, electric, HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), and phone service, and to identify any existing improvements that can remain as part of the new construction. In identifying all of these items, the architect will complete a set of as-built drawings.

Next, the architect overlays the new build-out for the school on the as-built drawings and provides the charter school board with an estimate of the likely cost of renovation. After any adjustments by the board, the final build-out drawings are used to bid the job to several local contractors, either by the landlord—if the landlord has agreed to make the renovations—or by the tenant.

Building from the Ground Up

After a few years of full or almost-full enrollment, the charter school board may want to consider building its own free-standing school. This requires the identification of a vacant parcel of property large enough for the type of school that has been chartered—elementary, middle, high, or special education school.

In most areas, land is plentiful. But in urban, inner-city areas, very little vacant property exists and creativity will be called for in identifying potential parcels to pursue. Developing a multi-story facility will allow the charter school to purchase a smaller parcel of property for its needs.

Once a parcel has been identified, the next step is to have the architect develop a site plan to give the charter school operator a visual idea of how the school will look on the vacant property.

The site plan is an overview of how the parcel of property is to be developed, showing buildings, parking spaces, landscaping, play areas, access, egress, and traffic flow on the site. In developing the site plan, the architect takes into consideration the location of water, sewer, and electric services. The architect also contacts the local department of transportation to review where the site access and egress need to be located.

Another rendering of the site that is helpful to the charter school board, charter operator, potential students, and parents is an elevation, or picture, of what the finished school will look like. This rendering may be accomplished by the architect him/herself or an associated firm.

When the charter school board has accepted the site plan, the architect then works with an engineering firm to design the inside of the school and to detail the site improvements. Interior design elements include mechanical drawings for the structure, electric wiring diagrams, plumbing lines, and HVAC. The site improvement plan, which will be produced by a civil engineer, includes landscaping, site lighting, paving, and drainage.

Once the plans are completed, the architect and the charter school board arrange to put the job out for bid, with the aim of securing a minimum of three bids on the plans from qualified local contractors.

Mark Howard has specialized in the development of commercial properties since 1980. He owns and operates M.H. Realty Associates, Inc. in Tamarac, Florida. Readers with questions on facilities and finances are encouraged to contact him directly at mgfl@aol.com. The most frequent questions about common problems will be included in future columns.

Charter Law Update

State Charter Law Rankings

"The Center for Education Reform issued a new ranking of the nation's 38 charter laws during Charter Schools Week in May."

The Center for Education Reform issued a new ranking of the nation's 38 charter laws during Charter Schools Week in May. The report shows that those states with multiple chartering authorities and few limits on the permitted number of schools have generated the greatest number of charter schools.

"A strong charter law is the single most important factor in creating strong charter schools," said CER President Jeanne Allen.

For more information...

WWW The CER report is available at http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools.

Other Charter School Law Changes

CER also reported the following recent changes to state charter school laws:

Alaska's weak charter law was improved with the elimination of the July 2005 sunset clause, extension of the allowable contract length from five to 10 years, doubling the cap to 60 schools, providing for a one-time start-up grant, and eliminating geographic distribution requirements. But CER notes that, even after the governor signs these changes into law, Alaska will still have one of the weakest state laws because of the requirement that local school boards must approve charters.

Hawaii no longer "shall" provide funding for charter school startups, but merely "may" provide funding. In addition, another step—an "independent review panel"—was created for charter formation.

North Carolina's charter school cap will remain at 100, as legislation to raise it died at "crossover" between the houses.

Tennessee, **Iowa**, and **Maryland** all remained free of charter schools when proposals to create them were killed by charter opponents or died at the end of the legislative session.

Missouri Earmarks Money for Oversight

Missouri is on the verge of becoming the first state to earmark money to help charter school sponsors with the costs of oversight, reported the May issue of *The Friedman Report*.

Details of the legislation were being worked out in a conference committee in early May. Sponsors of Missouri's two dozen charter schools are five public colleges and universities and the Kansas City and St. Louis school systems. The bill would provide sponsors a little over $23,000 for each school they oversee, and about $35 for each student the school enrolls. Often that money has come from the charter schools' operating funds.

"Sponsors need the money to do their job," said Jon Schroeder, director of the Charter Friends National Network. The appropriation in a state with diverse sponsors, he added, "is a very significant development and I'm sure other states will watch closely."

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Initial Assessment

Parents are free to choose where their child begins learning with K12, but the company offers an Internet-based initial assessment of the child's competency in math and language arts. The assessment program will be available this July at www.K12.com. Based on that assessment, K12 makes a recommendation on where to begin in the curriculum. Ongoing assessment is available once a student starts with a specific course.

Instructional Materials

K12 provides a comprehensive set of textbooks and instructional materials needed to complete a child's particular course of study. The instructional materials depend on grade level. For example, kindergarten materials include books, magnets, a magnifying glass, seeds, maps, an art kit, learning videos, and music CDs. Readily available books and materials, such as construction paper and chalk, are supplied by parents.

Computer Use

Computers are just one part of a multimedia curriculum that also includes books, workbooks, music videos and CDs, art supplies, and science instruments. Less than a quarter of the work for kindergarten through second grade involves computer usage, with the rest of the learning time spent in activities like reading books, working on math problems by hand, drawing, and conducting science experiments. Although computer use will increase with the age of the student, work away from the computer will remain an essential part of the K12 curriculum.

Courses Offered

K12 currently offers courses in language arts, math, science, history, music, and art. It will soon add health, physical education, and a virtues curriculum.

K12's four-year rollout schedule of offerings by grade is: K-2 in September 2001; grades 3-5 in September 2002; grades 6-8 in September 2003; and grades 9-12 in September 2004.

For more information...

WWW visit K12's Web site at **www.K12.com**. For more information about the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, visit **www.pavcs.org**.

enrolling students in early May. We'll add grades three through five at the start of our second year, and grades six through eight a year later. Finally, we'll add grades nine through twelve in September 2004.

If you signed up for all six courses for a year, the cost would be below a thousand dollars—about $895. If you did just one course in, say, art or music, it would be about $250. It's obviously a lot cheaper than tuition, and it's a lot cheaper than per-pupil expenditures in public or private schools.

Clowes: What do you want consumers to associate with the K12 name?

Bennett: I think people who know my work would associate what we're doing with *The Book of Virtues*, *The Educated Child*, and other work that I've done—that's the association I want them to have. It's basics, it's excellence, it's the education of character as well as the education of mind. I sometimes say that we are offering the heart and soul of an excellent education.

We also take some direction from E.D. Hirsch's work on the Core Knowledge program. John Holdren, who developed the sequence and the resource books for the Core Knowledge Foundation, is essentially our dean of curriculum. John oversees a staff of curriculum experts with about 500 years of real-world teaching experience. They work alongside our designers, artists, editors, writers, and technology experts. It's an extraordinary group of intelligent and hard-working people.

Clowes: What do you see as the major benefits K12 provides for the education consumer?

Bennett: They can trust it. It's not politically correct, it's just sound. It's solid, it's thorough. The technology gives it advantages, but here, as elsewhere, people can move at their own pace because it's individualized instruction. Above all, the one thing I always come back to, is the first-rate curriculum. I'm biased, obviously, but I think that this will be the best, most thorough, most engaging curriculum available anywhere in the world.

On a related front: It may comfort some people to know that the first people we hired were teachers, some very successful teachers and principals. We hired people from schools, and we also work closely with hundreds of parents, and they're the people who are really putting this program together under our direction.

Clowes: Will teachers have any interaction with the students?

Bennett: It depends on whether a family wants to interact with a teacher. There's interaction with the program, obviously. But there could be interaction with a teacher if that is something a parent wants. It is up to them. This goes back to the flexibility point. K12 can provide complete teacher support to those students who need it and for those families who want it.

"... K12 will offer every lesson, every day for 13 years in the six major subjects: math, English, history, science, art, and music."

In a charter school, there would be regular contact with teachers. For example, if you live in Pennsylvania and enroll your kindergartner, first, or second grader in the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School next year, the state will pay for the whole thing and you'll not only get the program, you'll get a computer system, an Internet connection, and a whole lot more, including full teacher support.

Clowes: What resources will K12 provide to support homeschoolers?

Bennett: We'll have phone lines where students can call up or email with questions. We'll help as much as we can, but we won't have anything like you'd have in the Virtual Charter School situation—unless a homeschooling family really wants that and is willing to pay the money for it. In the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, you'd have one teacher for every 40-50 children, which would assume interaction with a teacher at least once a week. That's not included in our standard K12 program.

We think the prompts, the responses, and the program will be such that people are going to be able to figure it out for themselves. We're trying to make it so that people are not going to have that much need of consulting with others.

I should add, however, that K12 regards the interaction between parent and child as essential to our purpose. Our program, quite simply, will not work without the devotion of a committed adult. And besides, children don't enjoy learning as much when they don't have the support and interest of their parents, and so we offer materials that help parents participate in their child's learning. And since the program allows the child to work at his or her own pace, parent and child can move through the curriculum at their own speed.

As one of my colleagues, Bror Saxberg—a senior vice president of K12—said the other day: "Kids aren't hard wired to sit in front of computers all day, they're wired to chase their mom around." K12's technology is not meant to replace a rigorous education. It's meant to facilitate one.

"I think that this will be the best, most thorough, most engaging curriculum available anywhere in the world."

Clowes: How is the use of computers in K12 different from the use of computers in schools now?

Bennett: I should say up front that some schools are using computers in a smart, productive way. What they understand, and what we remind ourselves at K12 every day, is that computers and the Internet are means, not ends in themselves. I think the logic is reversed in many of today's schools.

David Gelernter, K12's chief technology advisor and professor of computer science at Yale, is best on this subject. He understands the power and capacity of computers as well as anyone. But he believes that books and paintings and poems are usually more powerful than microchips, especially when it comes to educating children.

The way we have built our program at K12 allows parent and child to decide together how fast to move along—when to speed forward, when to go back and repeat, and when to dive even deeper.

Clowes: Four out of five new businesses fail. What is it about K12 that's going to make it successful?

Bennett: Well, every act of investment is a hope, and every act of education is a hope, too.

What we believe is that this is a philosophy, this is a curriculum with a point of view. We think it's what most parents want, and we think the way we've delivered it is very smart, engaging, and effective. More than that, we can't say.

I can't promise you we'll sell a million units or a million families will log on, but I think if people will take a look at what we offer, I don't think there's anything quite like the quality and comprehensiveness of K12. It's all here, not only in terms of all you need but also in terms of comparing what your child is getting to what we think is a first-rate standard. We're making it the best we can.

Clowes: What do you see as driving the demand for your product?

Bennett: Millions of parents care deeply about their child's education. If they have access to a program that will help them secure a world-class education for their child, for an affordable price, then I think there will be plenty of demand.

It's already clear to me that a lot of folks are dissatisfied with the status quo. But we are now getting a glimpse of the next chapter in American education. It's an exciting time for us.

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Arizona

Keegan to Head Education Leaders Council

In May, Arizona State Superintendent of Public Education Lisa Graham Keegan announced her plans to step down from her elected state post to become chief executive of the Washington, DC-based Education Leaders Council, an organization of state education leaders she helped found. Calling ELC an "action tank," Keegan said she would use the organization to launch referenda and propositions on state ballots—as well as to help develop the new mainstream of education thinking.

Center for Education Reform Newswire
May 8, 2001

For more information...

WWW visit the ELC Web site at **http://www.educationleaders.org**.

California

Paige to Address Teacher Union

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige will be the keynote speaker at the National Education Association's pre-convention Joint Conference on Bargaining and Instructional Issues on June 30 in Los Angeles. This is an unusual venue for such a high-ranking Republican official, particularly considering the topic and Paige's background in a right-to-work state. However, Paige was able to establish cordial relations with union officials in Texas and appears to be continuing that policy in Washington, DC.

Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué
May 7, 2001

Charter Proponents Fight Back

Fed up with the illegal imposition of regulations on California charter schools, the California Network of Educational Charters has taken the state Department of Education to court.

Represented by the Pacific Legal Foundation, CANEC is seeking declaratory relief from state regulations forcing charters to abandon their own financial accounting systems and replace them with more costly, inefficient, and burdensome financial reporting systems used by traditional public schools.

Regulations like these "undermine the very reason for creating charter schools—to cut through the complex tangle of red tape that saps creativity and innovation in our public school system," said CANEC Executive Director Sue Bragato.

Center for Education Reform Newswire
May 8, 2001

For more information...

WWW visit the CANEC Web site at **www.canec.org**.

Florida

Call for Change in Education Delivery

The underperformance of Florida's public schools provides support for changing the organizational structure of the state's educational system: from separate governance for K-12, community colleges, and higher education to a comprehensive K-20 system, according to a recent policy study from The James Madison Institute.

The transition to a K-20 system is one of the February 2001 recommendations of Governor Jeb Bush's Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force, which grew out of voter approval of a 1998 referendum to give the governor full responsibility for educational performance.

In detailing the need for change, James Madison Institute President and CEO Edwin H. Moore points out that the history of incremental changes to the educational service delivery system "has not served Florida well." The state's high school graduation rate for the school year 1999-2000 was 62.3 percent, one of the lowest in the nation. Just 28.2 percent of Florida 19-year-olds are enrolled in college; the national average is 38.8 percent.

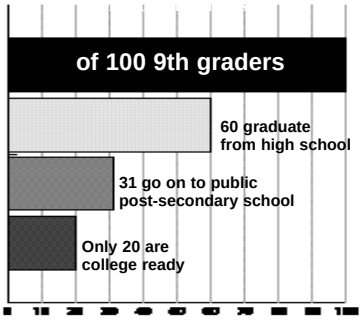
According to the Florida State Board of Community Colleges, only 15 to 20 percent of each year's graduating high school seniors are fully prepared for the rigors of higher education. Unprepared students must take remedial classes at great expense to taxpayers, students, and parents.

An analysis by the Florida Community College System found that only 60 of 100 public school ninth-graders in 1995-95 had graduated high school by 1998-99. Of those 60 graduates, 31 enrolled in state or community colleges but only 20 were found to be prepared for college.

"It is apparent the current K-12 system is not performing to the degree that any unbiased observer would find satisfactory," comments Moore.

The James Madison Institute
Policy Report #30, March 2001

Florida's Schools Prepare Few for College


of 100 9th graders
60 graduate from high school
31 go on to public post-secondary school
Only 20 are college ready
Of 100 9th Graders

Hawaii

Teacher Strike Ends

After a 20-day strike, public school teachers in Hawaii approved a deal in April that gave them a retroactive bonus totaling $1,100 for the two years they worked without a contract, plus a 16 percent increase over the life of the agreement. According to the American Federation of Teachers, the average Hawaii teacher earns $40,416.

Was the strike worth it? The state's last offer before the strike was a 14 percent increase and no retroactive pay. According to Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency, at the end of the four years the average Hawaii teacher will end up with just $148.51 more under the settlement than under the state's final offer.

Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué
April 30, 2001
May 1, 2001

Illinois

Funding-per-Student Hits $9,386 in Chicago

The Chicago Public Schools received record funding of $9,386 per student in 1999-2000, according to the April issue of the *ITEF Review* from the Illinois Taxpayer Education Foundation.

Measured in current dollars, funding rose from $6,001 per student in 1984-85 to $8,453 in 1994-95.

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After dropping sharply, to $7,361 two years later, funding per student has increased an average of $500 a year for each of the last four years.

The *ITEF Review* also points out that much of this increased funding for Chicago's public schools has come not from Chicago taxpayers, but from state taxpayers. While state taxpayers provided only 30 percent of Chicago's public school funding four years ago, they now provide almost 38 percent. At the same time, the share of funding provided by Chicago taxpayers has dropped from 56 percent to 47 percent.

In 1999-2000, the Chicago Public Schools had 387,497 students and 23,568 teachers, for a student-teacher ratio of 16.4. This is similar to the student-teacher ratio at Chicago's Noble Street Charter School, the subject of a recent favorable *Chicago Tribune* editorial. Noble Street, with 16 teachers and 250 students, must make do on funding of just $5,000 per student, which has to cover building and other needs as well as instruction. One of the things it has covered is a laptop computer on every teacher's desk, something the Chicago Public Schools don't have, even with a far higher level of funding.

Chicago Tribune, April 30, 2001
ITEF Review, April 2001

School for At-Risk Students Delayed

Last year, shortly after denying Global Vision Network the opportunity to open a charter school for at-risk students, Alton school district officials announced plans to create their own charter school for at-risk students.

But in April, the district superintendent announced the district could not afford to start such a school because a change in Illinois charter law meant the district no longer qualified for Impact Aid funding.

According to Paul Seibert of Charter Consultants, however, the charter law has not changed. He says the superintendent's reason for withdrawing the proposal is "a misrepresentation of fact."

In the meantime, Global Vision Network received a federal charter school stimulus grant and has proceeded to revise its proposal for resubmission to the district. When the district withdrew its charter school plan, Seibert and Gregory Norris, president of GVN, Inc. met with the district's superintendent and assistant superintendent to again propose that GVN, Inc. and the district become partners in Norris' charter school proposal. The school district's response was "No."

Illinois Charter School Facs
May 15, 2001

Maryland

Students in 141 Schools Eligible for Choice

Under a little-noticed budget agreement between then-President Bill Clinton and congressional leaders in 1999, pupils in government schools that have consistently failed despite infusions of federal Title I money are to be given the option of transferring to a better-performing government school. But experiences in Maryland schools recently reported by the *Baltimore Sun* and *Washington Post* raise doubts as to how much real choice this entails.

For one thing, school bureaucrats can reject requests for transfers if they deem the new school to be too far away. In addition, the better-performing schools can reject transfers by claiming to have too little classroom space or too few teachers. Finally, failing schools that lose students suffer no adverse consequence; in fact, they receive increases in Title I aid.

Maryland officials so far have identified 141 schools, most of them in Baltimore, where pupils are eligible to apply for the transfers.

The Friedman Report
May 2001

Michigan

1 in 4 Public Schools Fails to Meet Standards

Michigan business leaders have called on state education officials to make public the results of the latest statewide school accreditation report. The State Board of Education and superintendent of public instruction decided to withhold the report when they realized that almost 900 of Michigan's 3,128 government schools—more than one of every four—were failing to meet the minimum standards.

"Hard-earned state and local tax dollars were used to prepare this report. Taxpayers have a right to know the results," stated Michigan Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jim Barrett. "This report must now be made public."

To be accredited, a school needs to establish, among other things, that at least one in four children is passing the reading, math, and science portions of the Michigan Education Assessment Program.

"This standard is extremely low," remarked Jim Sandy, director of Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence. "Now the education establishment is pushing for even lower standards. How low can we go?"

The Friedman Report
May 2001

Missouri

Charter-Issuing Authorities Taken to Court

In early May, a circuit judge in St. Louis accepted a petition for judicial review of a breach of contract question regarding The African American Rite of Passage Charter School. The TAARP school was the first St. Louis charter granted last year, just prior to a St. Louis Public Schools lawsuit that stopped all St. Louis charter schools. TAARP's sponsor, the University of Missouri-St. Louis, proposed to nullify the school's contract. The circuit court will examine evidence to determine whether the proposed nullification was an illegal action on UMSL's part.

Also in May, a circuit judge in St. Louis was scheduled to hear arguments that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education violated Missouri Charter Law when it failed to provide reasons for its denial of the Imhotep Academy Charter School proposal. After over nine months of review, the denial gives no explanation of how the proposal could be corrected, as required by law. Since the Imhotep proposal is based on another Missouri proposal previously approved, the school's founders believe the DESE review was unfairly discriminatory.

Illinois Charter School Facs
May 15, 2001

Ohio

Charter School Law Challenged

Charging that "Students are being exploited—and parents are being deceived" in the state's 70 charter schools, the Ohio Federation of Teachers has filed a lawsuit contending Ohio's charter school law is illegal. Joining OFT in the suit were the Ohio School Boards Association, several big-city unions, and the Ohio PTA.

The Ohio lawsuit is the 13th challenge to state charter school laws in the United States. All of the other cases resulted in charter laws being declared constitutional.

Jeanne Allen of the Center for Education Reform finds the involvement of the PTA particularly notable since it puts them in the position of "trying to block a public educational reform that has wide support in the parent community." She notes the bulk of charter school research shows a) charters are serving at-risk students far better than traditional public schools, and b) parents in charter schools are immensely satisfied with their choice.

Center for Education Reform Newswire
May 15, 2001

Pennsylvania

Governor Wins Choice Reforms

Governor Tom Ridge won passage of his choice-based school reform plan in a late-night session of the state legislature May 7 by conditioning his support for a pension increase for lawmakers, state employees, and teachers on approval of his far-reaching education plan.

Teacher union leaders criticized Ridge's program as "back-door vouchers"—even though it involves tax credits, tutorial grants, and school deregulation rather than vouchers. Key points in the Ridge reform include:

- Tax credits worth $30 million for corporate donations to tuition scholarships for low- and middle-income families, or for "innovative public education programs."
- Grants to parents of up to $500 for after-school tutorial help when a child in grades 3 to 6 scores below state minimums.
- New power to enable school boards to create charter-style "independent schools" run by separate governing boards composed of parents and teachers. The independent schools would have the authority to deviate from standard monopoly regulations in hiring staff and setting school hours and calendars.
- A requirement that teachers be tested every five years on mastery of academic standards that apply to what they are teaching.

"I didn't want to give [a pension boost] to them at all, unless we could get something for Pennsylvania," Ridge commented. "And we got a lot. . . . This is building on the reforms we have now in an important way."

The Friedman Report
May 2001

Washington

Seattle "Voucherizes" School Expenditures

Seattle has embarked on a means-tested "voucherizing" of regular school expenditures that *The New York Times*' Richard Rothstein finds "more show than substance," but full of potential for generating real reform if fully funded.

Seattle's idea is that pupils with greater needs attributable to such factors as poverty, limited English proficiency, or disability will bring a higher share of public money with them to schools they choose than will better-off students.

But the "differentials are too small to make a difference," says Rothstein. "A low-income elementary pupil brings only $259 in extra resources." He argues that if poor children carried larger sums of public money with them, "middle-class" schools would have an incentive to recruit them, and integration would increase.

The Friedman Report
May 2001

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Homeschooling on Technology's Leading Edge

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Supported by rapid advances in communications and in instructional technology, parents today are finding it easier than ever to educate their children at home, and to reject not only the "free" uniform educational offerings of their local public schools but also other fee-based school choice alternatives offered by religious and secular education providers.

However, as other school choice advocates have found, support from a capable defense lawyer is often necessary to protect the right of parents to educate their children at home.

To shield public schooling's approximately 85 percent share of the nation's K-12 students against unwanted competition from any other educational options, the nation's two teacher unions—the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—have been remarkably successful in fending off a wide variety of school choice initiatives at the federal and state levels. Most recently, union activism was largely responsible for the decisive defeats of voucher referenda in California and Michigan.

"[R]apid advances in computer technology appear to have made an end run around teacher union opposition to more conventional forms of school choice."

However, the teacher unions' strategy of defending their members against loss of students to traditional private schools may turn out to be the same kind of mistake the French made with the Maginot Line, where the forces the French wanted to block simply went around the obstruction. Today, rapid advances in computer technology appear to have made an end run around teacher union opposition to more conventional forms of school choice. Technology has created a new kind of "virtual" school that delivers its product through the cyberspace of the Internet.

Without the need for school buildings and large teaching staffs—since a parent usually takes over the role of teacher—the price of tuition at these virtual schools is significantly lower than the cost of tuition at a private school. Thus, when dissatisfied with the local public school and seeking another educator for their child, many parents find that instructor not in the Yellow Pages, but in the mirror.

The online schools described below serve not only homeschoolers, but also students in charter schools and students who remain in public schools.

Class.com

Headquartered in Lincoln, Nebraska, and founded in 1998, class.com is a privately held company that delivers online courses over the Internet for secondary students throughout the world. The company has enrolled individual students from all 50 states and also supports virtual schools in Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Class.com's virtual school customers teach 5.3 million students in 6,500 secondary schools across the country.

The company is a spin-off of the University of Nebraska's 72-year-old Independent Study High School, the oldest accredited correspondence high school.
www.class.com

K12

K12 is a new cyber-school created by former Education Secretary William J. Bennett. It will open this fall and offer a full year of lessons for homeschoolers in grades K-2 for approximately $1,000. Additional grades will be offered each year until 12th grade is added in 2004. The detailed curriculum, based on Bennett's book, *The Educated Child*, is being guided by former Core Knowledge Foundation researcher John Holdren. Only about 25 percent of the instructional time in grades K-2 is spent on the computer, with the balance spent offline reading books and doing other school work.

K12 also will manage and provide the curriculum for the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, which is chartered to the Norristown Area School District.
www.k12.com

Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School

This school opened last fall and has enrolled 500 students from across the state. Each student receives a laptop computer, printer, and textbooks, whose cost is covered by the approximately $7,000 per student per year that each student's home district must send to the charter holder, the Midland School District. The charter school offers a variety of accredited programs from the University of Missouri, the University of Nebraska, Keystone National, and Calvert.
www.midlandpa.org/wpccs

Florida Online High School

The Florida Online High School is intended for use by homeschooled children, students with scheduling conflicts, advanced placement scholars, and students who want to take courses their schools don't offer. The state funds the five-year-old school so that courses can be offered at no cost to its growing student body, which is expected to hit 6,000 next year.
www.fhs.net

Emily Yates, 8, gets help with her schoolwork from her mother, Laura. Mrs. Yates has seven children and home schools six of them. *Photo/George Thompson-Chicago Tribune*

Defending Cyber Schools and Homeschooling Parents

When the Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School began operating this school year, it drew approximately 500 students from 105 school districts across the state. Although the state's charter school law requires the home districts of these students to pay tuition to the charter school, about half of the districts balked. When the state Department of Education said it planned to withhold nearly $850,000 from the non-paying districts, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association in April sought an injunction against the Department.

The association argued the state's eight chartered cyber schools "are not true charter schools" but are "home-education programs relying on a high dose of technology—primarily the Internet—to deliver instruction and curriculum." On May 11, Commonwealth Court Judge Warren G. Morgan ruled the cyber school in western Pennsylvania "is operating lawfully," denying the request for an injunction and allowing the Department of Education to withhold funds from the non-paying districts.

Some Pennsylvania school districts make clear their dislike for homeschoolers by harassing parents who choose to instruct their children at home. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) currently is defending a mother who was charged with truancy after homeschooling her child for just five weeks and then returning him to public school with a portfolio of his work and an evaluation. After a judge dismissed the truancy charge, the school district demanded she provide numerous additional work samples from her son's home studies or face further legal action.

Some states are more hostile to homeschoolers than others. Adjusted for population, Massachusetts is among the top three or four states in the country for requests for legal help from homeschoolers, according to the HSLDA. In the early 1990s, two Massachusetts homeschool families refused to sign an agreement with the Lynn Public Schools that would have allowed the district to conduct random home inspections. When the case finally reached the state's high court in 1998, the court held that home education proposals "can be made subject only to essential and reasonable requirements," and home inspection was not one of those requirements.

A more recent home inspection case involving a North Carolina homeschooling family is now being appealed to that state's high court. The case has troubling implications for all Americans, not just for families who educate their children at home. Again, the HSLDA defended the family in court.

After the two-year-old daughter of home educators Mary Ann and Jim Stumbo ran outside for a few minutes one morning while her parents were in the house, an anonymous tipster called the Cleveland County Department of Social Services and reported seeing the child outside alone. In response, a social worker stopped at the Stumbo's house later that morning and asked to come in and talk to each of the couple's four homeschooled children alone.

When Mrs. Stumbo refused, she and her husband were charged with obstructing an investigation. A trial judge agreed, saying Fourth Amendment protections did not apply in this case. An appeals court agreed with the obstruction charge, ruling the social worker's investigation was not a "search" covered by the Fourth Amendment.

"In other words, in North Carolina and most other states, American citizens have no protection against well-meaning social workers acting on an anonymous tip and must cooperate or risk arrest and prosecution," noted syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker.

For more information...

WWW see the homeschooling cases listed under each state at the Web site of the Home School Legal Defense Association, **www.hslda.org.**

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Is Unionization of Teachers Good for Students?

New study says "Yes," earlier analysis said "No"

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

"When school children start paying union dues, that's when I'll start representing the interests of school children."
Albert Shanker, former president
American Federation of Teachers (1985)

"When workers at General Motors go on strike, they are too honest to try the public's patience with self-serving claims that they are really only trying to improve the quality of Chevrolets."
Boston University Chancellor John Silber
Lowell Sun, April 30, 2001

When teacher unions bargain on behalf of their members for higher pay, better benefits, and improved job security, do their efforts also have the effect of worsening children's education, as indicated by lower test scores?

A newly published study in the Winter 2000 issue of *The Harvard Educational Review* contradicts that view, finding states with higher SAT scores tend to be unionized states, and concluding unionization does not hinder educational performance. However, the nation's leading authority on the teacher unions has faulted that conclusion, saying it is based on "poor logic."

In the *Review* article, "Do Teacher Unions Hinder Educational Performance?" authors Lala Carr Steelman, Brian Powell, and Robert M. Carini write: "[W]e find a statistically significant and positive relationship between state teacher unionization rates and state standardized test scores, after controlling for potentially confounding factors. In other words . . . states with greater percentages of teachers in unions tend to report higher test performance of their students.

"Clearly, our study challenges the 'rent-seeking' view, which envisions teacher unions at odds with what parents desire from schooling, namely, the educational advancement of their children," they continue, suggesting their findings "should give pause to those who characterize teacher unions as adversaries to educational success and accountability."

Study Suffers from "Major Deficiencies"

But Education Policy Institute Chairman Myron Lieberman believes those conclusions should be rejected by the research community because of what he calls "major deficiencies" in the study.

For example, Lieberman points out that average SAT scores in Connecticut were high even before teachers there became heavily unionized. Also, the test scores in large urban districts—where the teacher unions are the strongest—are lower than the test scores of the remainder of the test-taking population. However, that correlation does not necessarily mean the teacher unions hinder educational performance in urban districts.

> **"[T]he article does not discuss or even cite some of the best recent research on the impact of the teacher unions on educational achievement."**
>
> **Myron Lieberman**
> **Education Policy Institute**

"[T]o demonstrate the impact of teacher unionization, it would be essential to provide data on educational performance before and after unionization," says Lieberman, noting "the article does not discuss or even cite some of the best recent research on the impact of the teacher unions on educational achievement."

One unreferenced work is a study by University of Chicago economist Sam Peltzman, who found increasing teacher unionization to be strongly associated with the decline in SAT scores during the period 1972-1981. Lieberman finds this omission "surprising" since Peltzman's findings are discussed in a book cited by the authors as one that criticizes teacher unionization without any empirical evidence to support its conclusions.

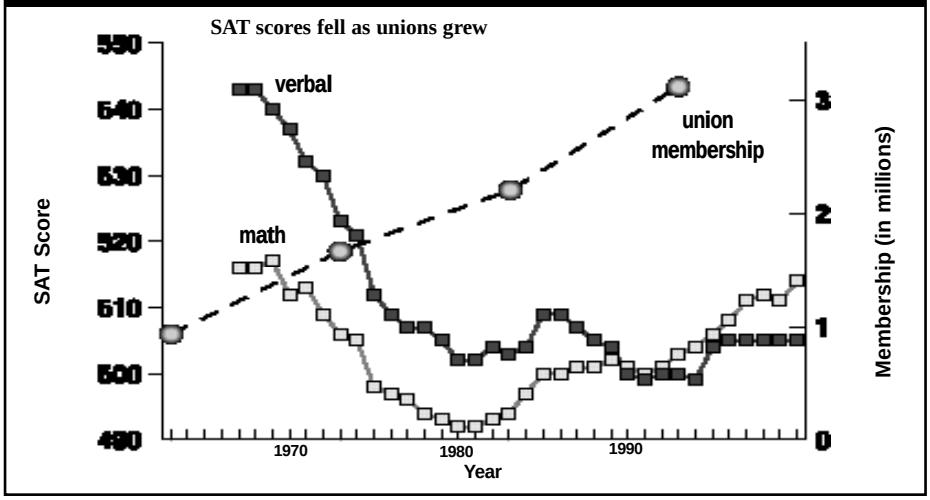
Teacher union membership jumped from less than 4 percent in 1960 to over 84 percent in 1989, with almost all membership concentrated in two unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. But during that period, composite SAT scores—before later recentering—fell almost 10 percent, from 980 in 1963 to 890 in 1981. Peltzman conducted a careful state-by-state study of the 1972-1981 period.

"[T]he decline in [student] performance did go furthest in those states whose legislatures were most responsive to teachers unions and in which the pioneer union (AFT) scored its earliest success," he concluded. "However, early success by the AFT's initially reluctant rival (NEA) is associated with improved school performance in the 1970s. This is offset in the 1980s, and there is an unambiguously negative association of union growth and school performance in this period."

The deterioration in student performance did not occur because the teacher unions "are indifferent or hostile to student achievement," stressed Peltzman. In fact, just the opposite may be the case. But union concerns and education concerns do not necessarily go hand in hand.

"Union-style job security, for example, is not compatible with flexibility in replacing mediocre or poor teachers," noted Peltzman.

Teacher Union Membership and SAT Scores



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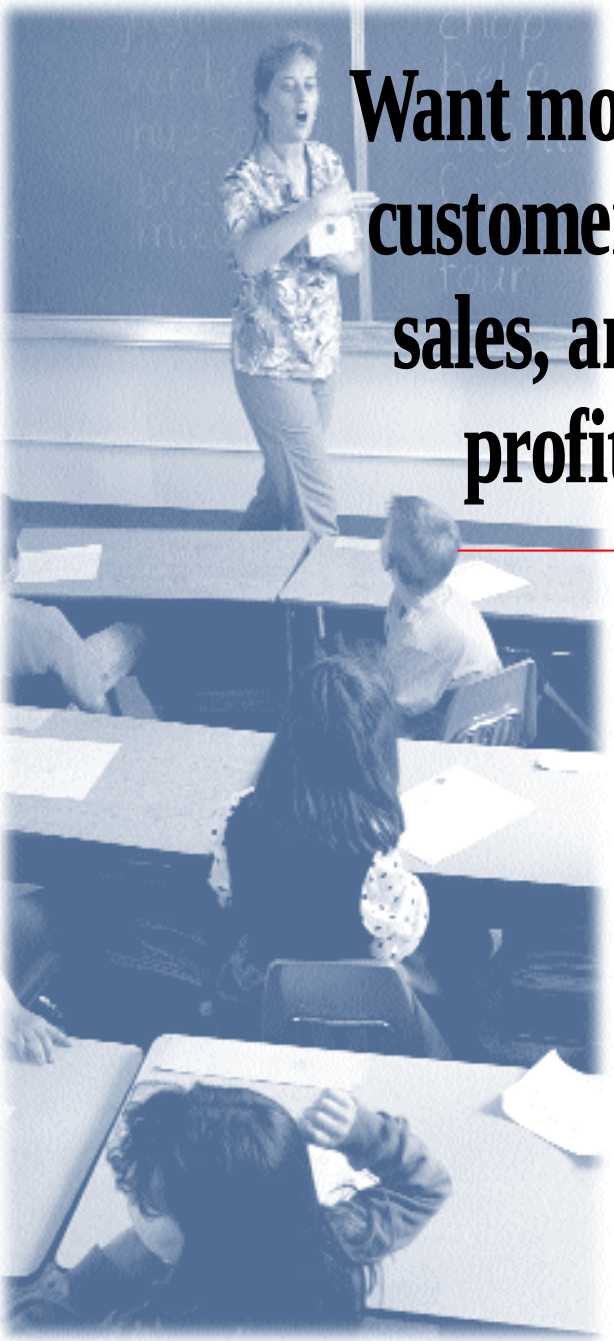

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